

What is claimed is:

1. (Currently Amended) A toe engaging apparatus for an interior of a footwear item, the apparatus comprising a panel configured to extend at least partially across a toebox of the interior of the footwear item, the panel being coupled directly to an interior of the footwear item such that the panel is positioned inside the toebox to engage [[an]]a forward edge of at least one of the wearer's toes, said panel being spaced from the toebox at a mid portion thereof absent the wearer's toes forcing said portion into contact with the toebox.
2. (Original) The apparatus of Claim 1, wherein the panel includes a flexible material.
3. (Original) The apparatus of Claim 2, wherein the panel includes a stretchable material.
4. (Original) The apparatus of Claim 2, wherein the panel includes neoprene.
5. (Original) The apparatus of Claim 1, wherein the panel is coupled to the interior of the footwear item using a bonding mechanism.
6. (Original) The apparatus of Claim 5, wherein the bonding mechanism includes at least one of stitching, adhesive bonding, and thermal welding.
7. (Original) The apparatus of Claim 1, wherein the panel is coupled to the interior of the footwear item at a plurality of points along at least one of a lower edge of the panel and side edges of the panel.
8. (Original) The apparatus of Claim 7, further comprising an insole disposed in the interior of the footwear item, wherein the panel is coupled to the insole.
9. (Original) The apparatus of Claim 7, wherein the deformable panel is coupled to the interior of the footwear item so that at least a portion of an upper edge of the panel is moveable relative to the inside of the toebox.
10. (Currently Amended) A toe engaging apparatus for an interior of a footwear item, the apparatus comprising:

a panel configured to extend at least partially across a toebox of the interior of the footwear item; and
an attachment mechanism configured to position the panel in the interior of the footwear item so that the panel is positioned inside the toebox to engage [[an]]a forward edge of at least one of the wearer's toes, said panel being spaced from the toebox at a mid portion thereof absent the wearer's toes forcing said portion into contact with the toebox.

11. (Original) The apparatus of Claim 10, wherein the panel includes a flexible material.

12. (Original) The apparatus of Claim 11, wherein the panel includes a stretchable material.

13. (Original) The apparatus of Claim 11, wherein the panel includes neoprene.

14. (Original) The apparatus of Claim 10, wherein the attachment mechanism includes at least one of stitching, adhesive bonding, and thermal welding.

15. (Original) The apparatus of Claim 10, wherein the attachment mechanism joins the panel to the interior of the footwear item at a plurality of points along at least one of a lower edge of the panel and side edges of the panel.

16. (Original) The apparatus of Claim 15, further comprising an insole disposed in the interior of the footwear item, wherein the attachment mechanism joins the panel to the insole.

17. (Original) The apparatus of Claim 15, wherein the attachment mechanism is configured to flexibly join the panel to the interior of the footwear item so that at least a portion of an upper edge of the panel is moveable relative to the inside of the toebox.

18. (Currently Amended) A footwear lining apparatus comprising:
a liner configured to line an interior of a footwear item such that an interior of the liner generally receives a foot of a wearer and an exterior of the liner engages an interior of the footwear item; and
a panel configured to extend at least partially across a toebox of the liner, the panel being coupled to the interior of the liner such that the panel is positioned inside the toebox to engage [[an]]a forward edge of at least one

of the wearer's toes, said panel being spaced from the toebox at a mid portion thereof absent the wearer's toes forcing said portion into contact with the toebox.

19. (Original) The apparatus of Claim 18, wherein the panel includes a flexible material.

20. (Original) The apparatus of Claim 19, wherein the panel includes a stretchable material.

21. (Original) The apparatus of Claim 19, wherein the panel includes neoprene.

22. (Original) The apparatus of Claim 18, wherein the panel is coupled to the interior of the liner using a bonding mechanism.

23. (Original) The apparatus of Claim 22, wherein the bonding mechanism includes at least one of stitching, adhesive bonding, and thermal welding.

24. (Original) The apparatus of Claim 18, wherein the panel is coupled to the interior of the liner at a plurality of points along at least one of a lower edge of the panel and side edges of the panel.

25. (Original) The apparatus of Claim 24, further comprising an insole disposed in the interior of the liner, wherein the panel is coupled to the insole.

26. (Original) The apparatus of Claim 24, wherein the deformable panel is coupled to the interior of the liner such that at least a portion of an upper edge of the panel is moveable relative to the inside of the toebox.

27. (Currently Amended) A footwear system comprising:

an upper configured to receive a foot of a wearer, the upper being configured such that toes of the wearer can be at least partially moved without contacting an interior of the upper;

an outersole fixably mounted to the upper; and

a panel configured to extend at least partially across a toebox of the interior of the upper, the panel being coupled to the interior of the upper such that the panel is positioned inside the toebox to engage [[an]]a forward edge of at least one of the wearer's toes, said panel being spaced from the toebox at a

mid portion thereof absent the wearer's toes forcing said portion into contact with the toebox.

28. (Original) The system of Claim 27, wherein the panel includes a flexible material.

29. (Original) The system of Claim 28, wherein the panel includes a stretchable material.

30. (Original) The system of Claim 28, wherein the panel includes neoprene.

31. (Original) The system of Claim 27, wherein the panel is coupled to the interior of the upper using a bonding mechanism.

32. (Original) The system of Claim 31, wherein the bonding mechanism includes at least one of stitching, adhesive bonding, and thermal welding.

33. (Original) The system of Claim 27, wherein the panel is coupled to the interior of the upper at a plurality of points along at least one of a lower edge of the panel and side edges of the panel.

34. (Original) The system of Claim 33, further comprising an insole disposed in the interior of the upper, wherein the panel is coupled to the insole.

35. (Original) The system of Claim 33, wherein the deformable panel is coupled to the interior of the upper such that at least a portion of an upper edge of the panel is moveable relative to the inside of the toebox.

36. (Original) The system of Claim 27, wherein the footwear system includes one of a skate or a ski boot.

37. (Currently Amended) A method for engaging toes of a wearer in an interior of a footwear item, the method comprising:

forming a panel configured to extend at least partially across a toebox of the interior of the footwear item;

positioning the panel at a location inside the toebox of the interior of the footwear item so that the panel is positioned inside the toebox to engage [[an]]a forward edge of at least one of the wearer's toes, said panel being

spaced from the toebox at a mid portion thereof absent the wearer's toes forcing said portion into contact with the toebox; and
securing the panel directly to the toebox at the location.

38. (Original) The method of Claim 37, further comprising forming the panel from a flexible material.

39. (Original) The method of Claim 38, wherein the panel includes a stretchable material.

40. (Original) The method of Claim 38, wherein the panel includes neoprene.

41. (Original) The method of Claim 37, wherein the panel is secured at the location using at least one of stitching, adhesive bonding, and thermal welding.

42. (Original) The method of Claim 41, further comprising securing the panel to the interior of the footwear item at a plurality of points along at least one of a lower edge of the panel and side edges of the panel.

43. (Original) The method of Claim 42, further comprising providing an insole disposed in the interior of the footwear item and securing the panel to the insole.

44. (Original) The method of Claim 42, further comprising flexibly joining the panel to the interior of the footwear item so that at least a portion of an upper edge of the panel is moveable relative to the inside of the toebox.